ISSUE INTRODUCTION

From research into the specific to the universal in the general interest: educational research at the service of society

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Education is a complex set of actions which on the basis of dedication, effort, and cooperation, has as its aim to confer upon individuals the aptitudes, knowledge, training, cognitive resources, and values needed for them to be able to carry out a suitable personal development in the general interest and for the common good. Education is established as a system which articulates the functions of teachers and students, along with the general and specific pedagogical as well as didactic strategies and methods, the organization systems for centers, innovation and research, the economic resources which must be allocated —as a strategic priority— by governments, the provision of media and resources, etc. As we said above, it is a complex system involving the whole society, insofar as the whole society has to benefit from the best possible Education for its members.

Tirant lo Blanch, the starring knight in the homonymous novel written by the Valencian knight Joanot Martorell –editio princeps, Valencia 1490, with translations into Spanish (Valladolid, 1511) and Italian (the novel was a success in Renaissance and Baroque Italy: Venice, 1538, 1566, and 1611)— states during a famous passage of this novel staged before the Imperial Court of Constantinople that three things —"gente, alimentos y dinero [people, food, and money]"—are needed to win the war (the novel has as its context the war waged by the Byzantine Empire against the Ottomans during the mid-fifteenth century and, at least in the literature, Tirant manages to save Constantinople from being conquered by the Turks).

With our apologies for using the military simile, we would like to stress that this passage of a novel which is already clearly associated with Renaissance (described as "the best book in the world" by Cervantes in his Quijote) shows us the 3 pillars on which an Education which is at least suitable must be supported, namely: "gente," the people, the individuals, those who perform and receive the educational action, since a population with training and the best education for its members all through their lives, from child age to lifelong learning, will be in an ideal position to offer the best to society as a whole; "alimentos", it is not only a question of providing people with the necessary and suitable nourishment but also of giving them the best "food" for intelligence, training or, as it appeared on the façade of Pharaoh Ramses II's library, "food for the soul"; and "dinero," to sufficiently supply a strategic asset as is Education, so that it can reach the highest quality and become universal, and to ensure that the whole society without any exclusions whatsoever –for reasons related to economy, race, creed, gender, disability, etc.— will have access to the best possible education..

As a matter of fact, Education itself is —and should also be— always all-embracing, ubiquitous and implemented at any time and place, and as quickly as possible. Education cannot wait, and we must expect everything from it, and everything from all those who have it, who should be all society members. It could actually be said that Education has to be something "OMNIMODVS, VBICVVS ET IPSO FACTO ATQUE OMNI TEMPORE FACTUS"; exactly as the words said by Baron de Coubertin —"faster, higher, stronger" [CITIUS, ALTIUS, FORTIUS]— are fulfilled for the Olympic spirit.

Placing everything at everyone's reach, at all time and in all places, and for everyone's benefit, is a noble goal, and a vocation in itself; especially when it reflects the pro bono willingness to be helpful for society as a whole, and is inspired by values in addition to inspiring them. Furthermore, it has to be based on excellence research and pursue the aim of being able to provide society and the scientific community with the best possible knowledge; and do so in such a way that the authorities can legislate on Education in the best possible way and can allocate all the necessary resources to it.

In this context, research needs to be based on aspects such as internationalization, interdisciplinarity, and application to society. The University must spearhead all of these actions, giving a light intense and clear enough to dispel the grotesque shadows of Plato's cave, and that translates as "editing," which means 'bringing to light', 'preparing to be published,' 'publishing,' 'making known.' Thus, the wealth of research, development, and innovation –R&D&I, the new mantra in university research— when being published can prove truly useful for society.

Twenty-first-century education cannot possibly resemble what is shown to us on this famous fifteenth-century illustration (see Fig. 1): a classroom with a Magister (the intention in the picture is to represent the best master, Aristotle, although he is drawn with a turban in order to give him an Oriental air, which already tells us that not too much knowledge about such basic questions was available at the time) who teaches the lesson literally ex cathedra, seated and on a higher plane, before some students (only males here) sitting on fixed benches or desks which by no means permit a teacher-student relationship other than the unidirectional one, and even students who are talking to one another and are consequently not listening, and even some who have fallen asleep..

Fig. 1. Illustration representing a medieval university classroom

In the light of all the above, it is an honor for me to introduce these 8 papers which have successfully undergone a strict double blind peer review. These papers give us new contributions which constitute outstanding examples of present-day educational research.

Thus, Qureshi Haider (Pakistan) analyzes the factors behind child labor in certain districts of Southern Punjab, in Pakistan, taking as keywords such current concepts in today's globalized society —which should be corrected, as this research work rightly suggests— as: child labor, poverty, unemployment, and corporal punishment. In turn, Vali Mehdinezhad and Zaid Sardarzahi (Iran) carry out an in-depth study of leadership behaviors and their connection with the experience of educational center principals as far as management is concerned. The method utilized in this study is quantitative. The key concepts in this paper are highly topical, insofar as the need always exists for effective and cooperative management at educational centers (leadership behaviors, management experience, school principal, teacher).

Along a consistently complementary line is situated the paper by García Redondo on the governance processes that guide the organization and management of educational institutions in Portugal, within a context of analysis focused on the reforms carried out in this country from the beginning of the nineteenth century (when school responsibility was exclusively assumed by the State) to the present day. The keywords summarize that, in addition to governance as such, this paper deals with its application to educational administration and quality depending on the laws related to education.

Instead, Delgado Algarra adds another tile to the mosaic with his study about the keys to Japanese prosody and a didactic-technical analysis of OJAD (Online Japanese Accent Dictionary), placing the accent –if you'll excuse the repetition— on the fact that most of the studies dedicated to accent in foreign language teaching highlight that little attention is paid to prosodic aspects, both in didactic materials and in learning processes; and he applies it to OJAD. As highlighted in its keywords, this paper represents a useful contribution about educational technology for language, exemplification referred to the Japanese language, and examination of intonation and accent contours, all of them essential aspects to achieve competence in any language, since linguistic and communicative competences become fundamental for a suitable Education.

The paper by Herrera Torres, Buitrago Bonilla & Ávila Moreno about empathy in future lecturers at the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia turns out to be absolutely relevant in this respect. Its keywords —empathy, education

students, gender, age, and syllabus— show where the emphasis of this research work is placed.

ICTs cannot be left aside, and even less so considering their utilization, proposed by Marín Díaz and Sampedro Requena, to determine the ratings manifested by a group of Social Educator Degree students about a set of eleven Web 2.0 tools for educational intervention in the context of family and community invigoration and participation within school centers. Its keywords already reflect the global scope and interest for society of this paper: social invigoration, school centers, WEB 2.0, social educator social, and higher education.

The work of Barroso Osuna and Cabero Almenara, dedicated to the educational possibilities of Augmented Reality, represents yet another link in the chain of attention to ICTs and their huge potential for educational research. As shown by its keywords, this paper constitutes an essential contribution about the use of Augmented Reality for the curricular integration and educational development of emergent technologies.

Complementarily to the above, Gutiérrez Porlán and Serrano Sánchez perform an assessment and study the development of digital competence amongst future lecturers at the University of Murcia. The keywords already reveal that this paper focuses on something as essential as the training of future teachers, their digital competences, and the improvement of formative quality at University.

This panoramic view becomes complete with the paper written by Sancho Gil on the need to promote digital competences in Secondary Education. This research work takes a case study as its reference so that reality can be reliably verified in order to be able to suggest solutions. As summarized in its keywords, this is a research work which processes information about ICT uses within such an important environment as Secondary Education –which concerns such a large population segment, and at an age which turns out to be so significant for the consolidation of personal identity– seeking to assess which teaching methods can prove more effective, and offer safe guidance for educational policies.

Research, development, innovation, internationality, interdisciplinarity, cooperation, analysis and projections towards society based on rigorous quantitative and case study research, from the specific rigorously analyzed to the universal in the general interest… It is a real pleasure for me to introduce excellent research studies that can make an invaluable contribution both to educational research and to society as a whole.

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